

DIALOGIC RELATIONS IN WIVES AND DAUGHTERS AND ORLANDO

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ABSTRACT

Dialogism was developed by Mikhail Bakhtin where he maintained that there are dialogic relations in a given text on several levels. First, there is the level of dialogue between characters. Second, the characters' discourse is dialoguing with that of the writer of the novel. Third, dialogism exists between the reader and the writer. Then last but not least, dialogic relations occur between texts. In fact, in Elizabeth Gaskell and Virginia Woolf's respective novels, dialogism can be noticed at all these different levels and therefore the aim of this paper is to find out how and when these two women novelists had recourse to dialogism. Each level will be discussed, explained and illustrated from Wives and Daughters and Orlando.

KEYWORDS: Dialogues, Dialogic Relations, Bakhtin, Reader, Character, Novel

INTRODUCTION

Bakhtinian dialogism is much wider than mere dialogues between two characters in a novel as claimed by Baldridge (1994, p. 15). It is related to language. In his study of Bakhtin's concept, Bressler asserts that language is a constant dialogue between people (2007, p. 45), but dialogism is not only about languages and their fact of being heteroglot. Bakhtin (1981) considers the novel as the 'fullest and deepest expression' of 'the dialogic orientation' (p. 275), it is diversity and heteroglossia that distinguish the novel as a genre (p. 300). Therefore, in a novel the reader will find dialogues between the characters, as well as between the narrator and his character(s) and/or with the reader; and most important, dialogic relations between different other texts, for as Bakhtin (1986) explains 'any two utterances, if juxtaposed on a semantic plane...end up in a dialogic relation' (p. 117). Lodge joins in with his explanation of what dialogism is according to Bakhtin: 'the dialogic includes...the quoted verbal speech of characters...' (Cited in Baldridge, 1994, p. 15).

Gaskell's Wives and Daughters and Woolf's Orlando are used as examples in order to illustrate these different forms of dialogic relations.

DIALOGUES

In Wives and Daughters there are lots of dialogues that can be recorded between the different sets of characters created by Gaskell: dialogues between people belonging to the same social class, such as Miss Browning and Miss Hornblower about the fact that when Mrs Kirkpatrick – who is now Mrs Gibson – was a poor widow, she accepted the help and charity of the people at Ashcombe, but now that she is married again 'she speaks to... [Miss Hornblower] as if she could just recollect who ... [she] was, if she tried' (Gaskell, 1986, p. 324).

There are dialogues between the high and low classes. For instance when Mrs Goodenough reacted badly against the fact that the Cumnors and the duchess were very late and that the latter did not put on her diamonds that Mrs

Goodenough stayed late at night only to admire: ‘...they’re not worth waiting up for till this time o’night’, Lady Harriet; the Countess’s daughter was listening: ‘you don’t remember me, but I know you from having seen you at the Towers...’. Mrs Gibson tells Mrs Goodenough who the young lady is: ‘dear me, your ladyship! I hope I’ve given no offence! But, you see – that is to say, your ladyship sees, that it’s late hours for such folk as me...’ (Gaskell, 1986, p. 335). The poor old woman is terrified when she acknowledges Lady Harriet. She does not seem to assume her previous speech about the Cumnors and their guest’s attire in front of Lady Harriet¹.

In *Orlando* dialogues are not as numerous as those in *Wives and Daughters*; the former is a shorter novel and Woolf relies more on description and narration rather than on dialogues, but this does not mean that they do not exist; it is only a matter of amount and variety.

It is on page 12 that, for the very first time, we read that Orlando is speaking, but he speaks to himself. Orlando is a lonely person and does not communicate much, thus as a first utterance of the hero he pronounces: ‘I am alone’ (Woolf, 1975, p. 12), this is in fact a monologue and not a dialogue. Dialogues between characters in *Orlando*, if not rare, are imbedded within narration, as when Orlando being a woman in the nineteenth century thinks of the spirit of the age which is based on marriage and she had no one but her writing. She is with her servant and says:

‘Let me look at your ring, Bartholomew’, she said, stretching her hand to take it... ‘No’, she [Bartholomew] said, with resolute dignity, her ladyship might look if she pleased, but as for taking off her wedding ring, not the Archbishop nor the Pope nor Queen Victoria on her throne could force her to do that (Woolf, 1975, p. 169).

This is a common dialogue between two people, in this precise example it is between the servant and the lady of the house, Orlando. Yet, the interference of the narrator in the conversation leaves but a small space to both partners of the dialogue to utter their respective speeches themselves. However, the reaction of Bartholomew sheds light on the importance of marriage epitomized in the wedding ring and for Orlando, who is more or less a foreigner to the moods of the nineteenth century, the servant’s refusal to take off her ring proves that marriage is a sacred relationship; the loss of the ring might represent the end of that sacred union. Orlando is touched by Bartholomew’s reaction and argument and decides herself to follow the spirit of the age, i.e. find a man and get married.

THE CHARACTERS’ DISCOURSE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE WRITER’S

The other kind of dialogism includes ‘the relationship between the characters’ discourse and the author’s discourse (if represented in the text)’ (Baldrige, 1994, p. 15). The characters interact and converse and the writer’s discourse joins in, in order to add more clarification to what is going on.

The example that could be illustrative of this form of dialogism is when Molly Gibson, twelve years old, is found by Lady Cuxhaven and Clare sleeping in the garden of the Towers:

‘Poor little darling! She is overcome by the heat; I have no doubt – such a heavy straw bonnet, too. Let me untie it for you, my dear’.

¹Many other examples can be recorded, such as the dialogues between parents and children, master and worker, or husband and wife. There is a difference in the way a person speaks to the other because of his/her interlocutor’s sex, social class, education or age and this is called ‘style shifting’ in sociolinguistics.

Molly now found voice to say: 'I am Molly Gibson, please. I came here with Miss Brownings'; for her great fear was that she should be taken for an unauthorized intruder (Gaskell, 1986, p. 46-47).

In this passage the characters' speech and the narrator's discourse are used alternately in order not only to show what is happening, but to tell the reader what the character feels at the same time of the occurring event.

Almost the same technique is used by Woolf when Orlando is called by Queen Elizabeth:

'Here', she said, watching him advance down the long gallery towards her, 'comes my innocent!' (There was a serenity about him always which had the look of innocence when, technically, the word was no longer applicable)

'Come!' she said...Was she matching her speculations the other night with the truth now visible? Did she find her guesses justified? (Woolf, 1975, p. 17).

The Queen had already met Orlando but it was in the dark, now that she has asked him to meet her she is trying to find out if her guesses were true or not. In fact, in this passage there seems to be no dialogue between Orlando and the Queen. The only existing dialogue is between the narrator's discourse and the Queen's. The narrator comments on the event at the same time of its occurrence thus creating dialogic relations between the narrator and the character. Moreover, the Queen's speech would be incomprehensible if there is no dialogism with the narrator's discourse which provides explanation and argument.

READER WRITER DIALOGISM

There are other kinds of dialogic relations available in Gaskell's novel under investigation. These are dialogues between the writer and the reader. At different moments in *Wives and Daughters*, the writer is narrating some event then she addresses the reader.

Gaskell is telling about the place and role Mrs Hamley held at Hamley Hall, but now that she is dead everything seems to go wrong. The dead woman is referred to as the 'keystone of the family arch', and with no transition Gaskell stops speaking about her dead character to move to a rather psychological conversation with her reader;

It is always sad when a sorrow of this kind seems to injure the character of the mourning survivors...the judgements so constantly passed upon the way in which the way people bear the loss of those whom they have deeply loved, appear to be even more cruel, and wrongly meted out, than human judgements generally are (Gaskell, 1986, p. 286).

Then, in the same paragraph and in the same mood, Gaskell comes back to her story telling her reader about the deep sorrow of the poor old Squire. This kind of dialogic relations between a character's and real people's feelings enables the writer to involve her reader much more with the character than just narrating facts about his life and emotions.

Orlando is the Queen's favourite, but one day she sees him kissing a girl and she is outraged, her reaction is described as violent in 'snatching at her golden-hilted sword she struck violently at the mirror. The glass crashed; people came running; she was lifted and set in her chair again; but she was stricken after that and groaned much, as her days wore to an end, of man's treachery' (Woolf, 1975, p. 18), right after the end of this sentence, the narrator steps outside the narrative activity and addresses the reader by asking him/her questions: 'It was Orlando's fault perhaps; yet, after all, are we to blame Orlando? The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours; nor their poets; nor their climate; nor their

vegetables even' (Woolf, 1975, p. 18). It seems that the narrator is trying to justify the action done by Orlando, and through dialogic relations with the reader tries to persuade him that Orlando was not wrong; that it was a matter of age; the Elizabethan age was so different from the narrator's that one could not blame Orlando.

DIALOGIC RELATIONS BETWEEN TEXTS

The other type of dialogic relation which exists in Wives and Daughters is that between texts. Lodge clarifies this form of dialogism to be 'between all these discourses² and other discourses outside the text, which are imitated or evoked or alluded to' (Baldridge, 1994, p. 15).

Gaskell uses many other writers' texts and includes them in her own. This technique emphasises Bakhtin's (1986) saying that 'there are not nor can there be any pure texts' (p. 105). According to him (1981) a word is 'half someone else's'. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention' (p. 293). The novelist, as argued by Bakhtin (1981), will use the words that are 'already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master' (p. 299-300).

When Mr Gibson answered sarcastically to Cox's love-letter – his apprentice - which was addressed to Molly, the young apprentice goes to the doctor to clarify the affair, Mr Gibson replies; 'Molly has no mother, and for that very reason she ought to move among you all, as unharmed as Una herself' (Gaskell, 1986, p. 86). Una is the symbol of Truth and True Faith in Spencer's Faerie Queene as explained by Gaskell (1986) in her notes (p. 711). Thus, the simple mention of this name creates a dialogic relation between Gaskell's text and Spencer's. The word is used on purpose, in order to allow the reader to have a better image of the idea expressed by her character³.

Woolf starts her fifth chapter with descriptive details of the environment:

The great cloud which hang, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first days of the nineteenth century stayed... A change seemed to have come over the climate of England...the sun shone of course, but it was so girt about with clouds and the air was so saturated with water, that its beams were discoloured (Woolf, 1975, p. 160).

In this introductory paragraph of chapter five, Woolf refers to the nineteenth century with all the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Right from the beginning she sets the tone of the period, that it will be cloudy, damp, smoky and dirty. Indeed, damp was a major characteristic of the age. Dialogism here occurs between the story of Orlando and previous historical and fictional texts that Woolf had probably read of the early nineteenth century. Her description of the weather and the heavy atmosphere recalls the reader of Dickens', Gaskell's, Disraeli's and other Victorian writers' descriptions when they set their stories in industrial England. Furthermore, these environmental details are not put only as ornament, they are juxtaposed with Orlando's life as when she says: 'While this went on in every part of England, it was all very well for Orlando to mew herself in her house...Even she, at length, was forced to acknowledge that times were changed' (Woolf, 1975, p. 163).

² The discourses referred to are those that represent the verbal speech of characters as well as the characters' discourses in relation to the writer's.

³ Yet, in order to have this kind of dialogic relation, the reader must know the text referred or alluded to. In the case of Una, Gaskell provides the explanation in her notes.

CONCLUSIONS

This form of dialogism; the one that concerns the dialogic relations between a text and another have to do with intertextuality. All intertextual references do prove the existence and the occurrence of dialogic relations in both novels. The aim behind the use of both intertextuality and dialogism is, in fact, writing metafiction.

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